10. VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

10.1 Vegetation Clearance Around the Structure

The clearance of flammable vegetation around buildings has proven to be one of the most effective factors in surviving wildfire. It provides for defensible space, increased safety and working room for firefighters, reduced chance of direct flame contact, and reduced intensity of radiated heat from the approaching wildfire.

The 30-foot clearance should include:

- Well irrigated grass, which is an excellent firebreak;
- Removal of downed and woody litter;
- Choosing low-growing plants spaced apart so they do not touch;
- Not placing plants directly against the home as they act as a wick.

10.2 Vegetation Clearance 30-100' Plus

30-100 feet of clearance may be required because of extra-hazardous conditions (PRC 4291).

Within 30 feet of structure and beyond, up to 100 feet or more, provide a buffer from wildfire by thinning vegetation. Homes on slopes can be especially vulnerable. By limiting the vegetation, the home has a good chance to survive a wildfire. Get rid of ladder fuels by performing the following measures:

- Prune branches at least 15 feet up.
- Trees should be thinned so crowns do not touch.
- Break up continuous patches of brush. Leave a few scattered on the property for erosion control and aesthetics.
- Be sure to remove all dead brush, dead and down logs, and materials that could contribute to a "spotting bed," a location where an ember could land and provide a fuel source to start a wildfire.

Photograph 10.1.
House Showing Defensible Space

10.3 Community Fuel Breaks

A fuel break is recommended around all dwellings for increased protection over and above that level of protection provided by clearance only (**PRC 4290**).

10.4 Characteristics of Fire Resistive Vegetation

All plants will burn under extreme fire weather conditions such as drought. However, plants burn at different intensities and rates of consumption. Fire resistive plants burn with relatively low intensity, slow rates of spread, and with short flame lengths. The University of California Forest Products Laboratory has a listing of fire resistive vegetation available on their website, http://www.prefire.ucfpl.ucop.edu/. The following are characteristics of fire resistive vegetation:

- Growth with little or no accumulation of dead vegetation (either on the ground or standing upright)
- Non-resinous plants (willow, poplar or tulip trees)
- Low volume of total vegetation (for example, grass area as opposed to a forest of shrub-covered land)
- Plants with high live fuel moisture (plants that contain a large amount of water in comparison to their dry weight)
- Drought tolerant plants (deeply rooted plants with thick heavy leaves)

- Stands without ladder fuels (plants without small fine branches and limbs between the ground and the canopy of overtopping shrubs and trees)
- Plants requiring little maintenance (slow growing plants which, when maintained require little care)
- Plants with woody stems and branches that require prolonged heating to ignite.